

Devotional  
7 October 2011  
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It's tough at 0530 in the morning in the dark trudging around the old running track at Aviano Air Base where I'm TDY. As I come out of the dark end of the track where there are no lights I hear a deep Army based voice that has spoken to troops in a loud voice for years. I'm hearing him from the fifty yard line and he's a little miffed.

"All right you truckers. You know the commander said no one was to ride, in a car or bus, anywhere on this trucking base. That's because one of you truckers is a thief. Stealing a trucking hundred Euros from our lieutenant; a trucking seventy-five dollars from a specialist; and another soldier lost fifty to this trucking thief. A trucking order is a trucking order. You follow it. So don't ask any trucking Air Force buddy to give you a ride to PT. You trucking walk or run on this base." The sergeant went on from there with the same verb, adverb, and noun punctuating his speech on what he thought of thieves. You may have guessed he was not using the word truck or trucker. I have just switched the word to trucker to protect the innocent.

My theme in this missive is about integrity. I'm not going to write about the sergeant's integrity over the language he was using. I kind of trucking agreed with him about the thief in their midst. I'm not going to say that the Air Force is better than the Army because we use better language when we are upset. That is not a truth. I will briefly say in the military you have to follow orders dumb or not because we must have good military discipline for when we confront the enemy. You need the integrity of discipline and following an order for the sake of the fight and mission. True, you should not follow an order that is illegal or will be a crime in our Military Code of Justice; the proper manner is via chain of command.

I am going to write about the integrity of the individual within the unit. I'm sure in this group of twenty some soldiers early on that morning they felt they had lost their integrity because now in public their unit's moral center had been exposed; everyone on that running track heard that some of these soldiers did not follow orders and some stole from their fellow warriors. In many ways the military unit becomes you. That's unit's failures and triumphs become the individual's way of feeling about themselves. Those who were not the thief and had followed orders walking to PT early in the morning had low moral as if they were a culprit. Just because of a thief and someone who could not follow orders, the fighting and winning capability of that unit was in jeopardy.

Worse yet the thief, inside their soul, will know who he is. His understanding of self has reached a negative. He can choose to quit stealing and or break orders; choose to confess and seek reconciliation; or choose to go on with his behavior creating a goofy logic of that behavior to create a barrier against his own shame. That barrier creates distance as the thief's internal integrity erodes. In time he will find he has placed himself emotionally outside of the unit. For if you steal from someone you will always be afraid they will know who you really are. If you steal from those you need to trust in a crisis how can you ask them for friendship. Stealing creates loneliness within the thief because he knows no one can be his friend.

In time our thief, if they continue to steal, will constantly see himself as a loser, a loner, a person of no value; a person with no integrity. This is a dangerous thought process only forgiveness can stop. Hyrum H. Plaas wrote, "Loss of integrity diminishes everybody's opinion of you, including yourself."